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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2006

In Today's Papers

Pope Remarks Cause Strong Reaction in Turkey

All papers report Pope Benedict XVI said on Sunday that he was "deeply sorry" about the Muslim anger caused by his recent remarks regarding the concept of holy war (jihad) in Islam and the Prophet Muhammad which he made in a university lecture on Tuesday. "I am truly sorry for the reactions caused by a brief passage of my speech. These were quotations from a medieval text that do not express in any way my personal opinion," the Pope said. Turkish papers say the Pope has expressed regret, but stopped short of apologizing for his statement. Turkish Religious Directorate (Diyanet) head Ali Bardakoglu rejected the Pope's remarks, calling them a "third-rate apology." Radikal says instead of apologizing, the Pope merely said his remarks were a quotation. The Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak says the Pope will apologize on Wednesday in a detailed statement issued by the Vatican. Cumhuriyet claims the Pope's statement was a "provocation" designed to spark a clash of civilizations, opening the way for the US Greater Middle East Project.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I said he expected Turkish nationalists and Islamic activists to continue pushing for the trip the Pope is scheduled to make to Istanbul in late November to be cancelled. However, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul told the press on Sunday before heading to New York to attend the annual UN General Assembly, "From our point of view, there is no question of any change in the visit." Sunday papers reported that Gul had written to Benedict XVI urging him not to cancel his visit to Turkey, saying it was an important opportunity to foster dialog between different cultures.

Columnist Mehmet Barlas, writing in the mass appeal Sabah, says the Pope's remarks reflect his "intolerance" and "lack of comprehension" of world affairs: "Pope Benedict's recent remarks deserve more pity than anger because they reflect his lack of comprehension of world affairs and his intolerance. It is a pathetic situation because he

became the Pope at a time when the entire world is in most immediate need of consensus between civilizations and different cultures. However he seems even unaware of the most recent Danish cartoon crisis. Therefore his attempt to express 'regret' does not change anything. The whole thing can be summed up by the slogan: as long as the Pope lives in Rome, tolerance lives in a coma."

Writing in the mass appeal Hurriyet, Mehmet Y. Yilmaz comments that the Pope's remarks should not be surprising, and that they must be "happy news" for President Bush: "The recent incident and growing reaction against the Pope proved once again that the Islamic world is very vulnerable to provocations. Let's not forget that the Pope is the leader of Catholic Christians and it does not require research to learn his basic approach to Islam. In fact whatever Muslim religious figures think of Christians, the same is valid for the Pope about Muslims. In other words there is nothing to be surprised about here. At this point transferring a theological argument to the political arena will harm everybody. Meanwhile the growing reaction against the Pope in the Islamic world must be happy news for President Bush. President Bush's strategy to reshape the world is melded into the conflict of civilizations argument, and the recent controversy only serves this purpose."

Ralston Meets Barzani

Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Bugun, Zaman and others reported on Sunday Joseph Ralston, US special envoy for countering the PKK, has met Massoud Barzani, the leader of Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and president of the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq, to express US uneasiness over the PKK activities in northern Iraq. Papers said Ankara had been discomfited by Barzani's offer of intermediation to Ralston for resolving the problems with the PKK. The main opposition CHP said the Barzani remarks marked the start of negotiations with the terror organization.

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Rusen Cakir, commenting in the mass appeal Vatan, points out that PM Erdogan may come to regret his upcoming trip to Washington if he "fails to get something tangible" from President Bush in the fight against the PKK: "The US has not taken any concrete step to eliminate the PKK presence in northern Iraq despite the ongoing, never-ending terrorist acts in Turkey. This has caused a serious and growing anti-Americanism as it comes with three preconceived arguments. First, most believe that Washington has no intention to resolve the PKK issue and its main focus is to work for an independent Kurdish state in Iraq. Second, to many the US has no intention of making the PKK give up violence by using military force. It is believed that the US wants to achieve this goal by forcing the PKK through the political system which, in the end, will come to Ankara in the form of some unacceptable demands from Washington, such as the release of PKK leader Ocalan from prison. Finally, there is a belief that the US intends to push Turkey for more radical reforms with the pretext of solving the Kurdish issue -- which may lead to a crack in territorial integrity. If PM Erdogan fails to get something tangible from President Bush in the fight against PKK, his visit to Washington will be a trip to regret. It is no secret that there are many anti-AKP figures in the US capital and they seem to be close to the President."

Sezer Stresses Secularism on First Day in School

All papers report President Ahmet Necdet Sezer stressed in a message in connection with the opening of the new education year the importance of honoring Ataturk's principles and secularism in education. Sezer called for the closure of illegal Koran courses in Turkey, saying they can damage children with "dogmas and false beliefs." Some 14 million primary and secondary school children go back to school today, the first day of a new academic year.

TV News:
(NTV, 7.00 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Turkish Land Forces Commander Ilker Basbug expressed determination to eradicate the PKK at a funeral in Van for security officials

killed in clashes with the terrorist organization.

- Osman Baydemir, the mayor of the mainly Kurdish Diyarbakir, rejected charges that the wireless devices used in early last week's deadly Diyarbakir bombings had been similar to the devices found in the car of his brother two years ago.

- TUSIAD chairman Omer Sabanci said current deficit and inflation levels were very critical indicators for the Turkish economy.

- Guler Sabanci, the chief of Sabanci Holding, told The Observer that the West has the wrong perception about her country - that women have always been highly regarded in Turkey.

International News

- The Knesset has authorized a war inquiry into the way the Israeli government and military handled the Lebanon war.

- Coalition talks between Palestinian President Abbas and the Hamas party have stalled over Hamas' refusal to recognize Israel.

- Six bomb attacks across the oil-rich northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk killed 25 and wounded another 70.

- Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis said Turkey's EU membership will be possible only after the recognition of Cyprus.

- Some 7,000 US and Afghan troops launched a renewed push,

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"Operation Mountain Fury," against the Taliban in central and eastern Afghanistan.

- The summit meeting of 118 Nonaligned Movement nations in Havana urged unconditional talks with Iran to solve the nuclear dispute and condemned the Israeli offensive on Lebanon.

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WILSON